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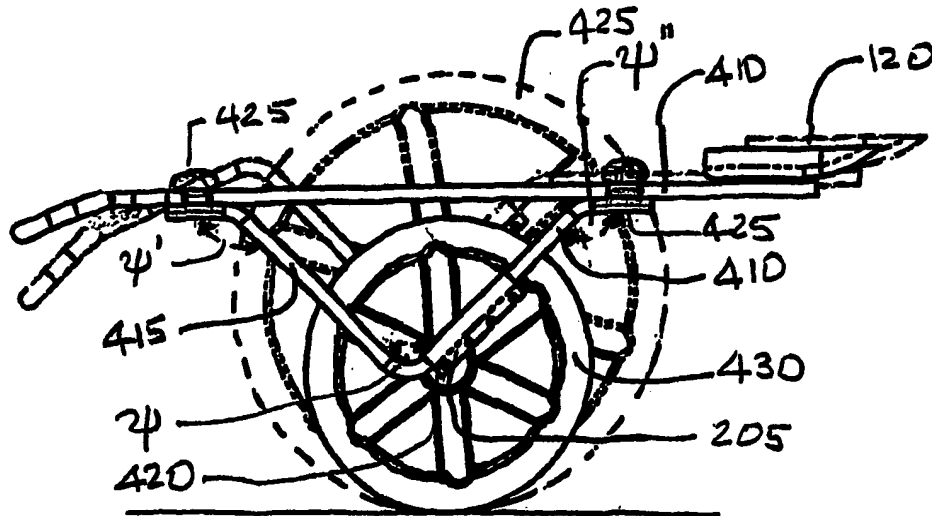
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(54) Title: WHEELED SHOVEL



(57) Abstract: An apparatus comprising a shovel disposed on a relatively large wheel and a method of using the apparatus for handling a load of material. The apparatus involves a shovel having a handle formed at the end of an elongate yoke, the yoke being mounted, at its middle portion, onto the axle of a relatively large wheel for the purpose of picking up of a load, transporting it to a location, and propelling the load overboard with a quick arm/body motion on the part of a person operating the handle. The substantially waist-high wheel is adapted to receive the body force of an operator as an effective leverage through the handle and cause a recoil action from the wheel to enhance the throwing power of the apparatus of the invention, comprising the shovel, the wheel and the yoke as the driving member.

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WHEELED SHOVEL

[0001] This application claims priority to US Patent Application No. 10/808,841 filed on March 25, 2004, which is related to the US Provisional Application No. 60/539,066 filed on January 26, 2004, the entire content of which is hereby incorporated by reference.

FIELD OF INVENTION

[0002] The invention relates generally to manual wheeled vehicles for moving and disposing materials. More particularly, the present invention relates to a snow removal shovel on a wheel which provides a recoil action to assist in propelling the snow.

BACKGROUND OF INVENTION

[0003] Numerous manual wheeled vehicles have been in use to assist in transporting materials from one place to another. Age old wheelbarrow is, of course, well known. However, aside from transporting alone, loading onto and unloading of materials from a vehicle easily and with minimum stress and strain to the human body have required different approaches. This has been true for shoveling or plowing snow, including wet and heavy slushy snow.

[0004] In US Patent 5,918,921, Samuelson shows a levered shovel for moving snow. The shovel includes a blade for carrying the snow, a shaft that extends from the blade, a wheel assembly for contacting a horizontal surface and which depends from the shaft, and a handle assembly for gripping by the user and which is disposed on the rearmost end of the shaft. The wheel assembly comprises either an axle fork, an axle rotatively mounted to the axle fork, and a pair of wheels attached to the axle or an inverted T-shaped member with its transverse portion serving as its axle to which a pair of wheel are rotatively attached. The handle assembly comprises a lower transverse member for gripping by the hands of the user and extends laterally from both sides of the rearmost end of the shaft and an extender for elevating the point at which the user grips the handle assembly for users with limited bending posture.

[0005] Jurkowski, et al., disclose a wheeled snow shoveling device in US Patent 5,511,327. The shoveling device comprises a cart having a handle formed in a generally A-shaped configuration with a cross bar including a circular ring extending therefrom. The cart includes a wheel with an axle positioned at its axis, the wheel including a pair of vertical support bars affixed to the axle, the wheel also including a pair of horizontal braces affixed to its axle. The lower segment of the handle is coupled to the braces. A snow shovel has a blade formed as a generally rectangular shaped member and is molded into a semi circular configuration, the rear surface of the blade being coupled to the free ends of the horizontal braces of the cart wheel. The blade has a wooden shaft affixed to its rear surface, the shaft extending through the circular ring on the cross bar of the handle, the free ends of the vertical support bars being coupled to the shaft.

[0006] In another approach for removal of snow, Petruzzelli discloses in US Patent 6,675,507 an articulated shovel blade for pivoting movement relative to a wheeled carriage on which the blade is mounted. The shovel blade is adjustably locked in position at different angles relative to the direction of travel of the carriage, for pushing snow or other material to the side of the shovel as it travels across the ground. The carriage is pushed forward using a handle or a motor is provided for self-propelling the carriage.

[0007] In still another approach, Lobato describes in US Patent 5,581,915 a snowplow carriage assembly for removal of snow manually by plowing the snow in an area to be cleared of snow. The carriage is a manually propelled wheeled structure made of a plurality of members pivotally connected for collapsing and folding for storage and unfolding for use in supporting and transporting a snowplow in the form of a replaceable conventional snow shovel having a handle straight length portion. The carriage is configured so that the snow shovel handle is removably mounted thereon inclined from the horizontal defining an acute angle relative to a surface on which snow is being plowed. The snow shovel inclination is variable for establishing different acute angles of the shovel relative to the surface for plowing the snow thereon and removal therefrom.

[0008] In US Patent 6,643,958, Krejci discloses a snow throwing shovel device for removing snow from narrow sidewalks and from steps where a conventional snow blower cannot be used. The snow throwing shovel device includes

a scoop assembly including a housing having top, bottom, side, and back walls, and also having an open front. The shovel also includes an elongate chute attached to the scoop through which snow is moved. The shovel further includes a discharge spout rotatably mounted to the elongate chute, handle members attached to the elongate chute; and an assembly for picking up snow and moving snow through the elongate chute.

[0009] The present state of prior of art, thus, generally provides two types of shovels which are particularly common. One type involves lifting and throwing of the snow, and the other involves pushing of the snow like plowing. These cited prior art references are incorporated by reference in their entirety. What is needed is a combination of the two types of snow shovels where the plowing type of action can be incorporated into a shovel which also lifts and throws the snow with ease and with least ergonomical discomfort.

SUMMARY OF INVENTION

[0010] The present invention involves a wheeled shovel having a handle formed at the end of an elongate yoke, the yoke being mounted, near its middle portion, onto the axle of a relatively large wheel for the purposes of picking up of a load, transporting it to a destination, and propelling the load overboard with a quick body (or arm) motion on the part of a person operating the handle. The substantially waist-high wheel is adapted to receive the body force of an operator as an effective leverage through the handle and cause a recoil action from the wheel to enhance the throwing power of the apparatus of the invention, comprising the shovel, the wheel and the yoke as the driving member.

[0011] An embodiment of the present invention involves an apparatus for removing and disposing materials. The apparatus comprises a wheel assembly having a rim and an axle connected together with spokes radially projecting from the axle. The axle includes a fulcrum member capable of transmitting a recoil reaction to an action. A driving member has an upper portion, a middle portion and a lower portion. The middle portion is generally "S-shaped" and is attached to the fulcrum member of the axle. A handle is attached to the upper portion of the driving member and is capable of moving the wheel assembly. A blade is attached to the lower portion of the driving member, the blade being adapted to pick up a load of

material from a surface when the blade is lowered to the surface by raising the handle and pushing forward. When the handle is pushed downwards, the downward action causes the wheel to compress and recoil through the fulcrum member at the axle of the wheel. As a result, the blade springs upwards and forwards, thereby propelling the load of material briskly away from the apparatus. The lever action motion of such construct allows advantageous lifting of the load and acceleration of the load from the shovel blade.

[0012] In another embodiment of the present invention, there is a wheel assembly comprising a wheel or a solid disk having an axle connection portion for connecting the wheel and disk to an axle. The driving member, which is preferably a yoke member, has at the middle portion of the member a desired angled portion, which may be a part of the yoke or a supporting structure for the yoke, in contact with the axle of the wheel or disk. The included angle of the angled portion is about 70° to about 110° , more advantageously about 85° to about 95° . The longest dimension of the yoke may comprise a straight, or approximately straight, portion.

[0013] An aspect of the embodiment of the present invention comprises a wheel assembly having a rim and an axle, the axle further comprising a tubular body having two ends adapted to receive spokes which connect the axle to the rim. The axle further is adapted to receive a plurality of springs at the two respective ends of the axle to act as a fulcrum, and transmit a recoil reaction to an action applied at the axle. An elongate U-shaped driving member has a curved upper portion, a generally straight middle portion and an open lower portion. The middle portion is attached to the springs at each end of the axle. A handle forms the upper portion of the driving member, and is capable of moving the wheel assembly. A shovel blade attaches to the lower portion of the driving member, the shovel blade adapted to pick up material from a surface when the blade is lowered to the surface by raising the handle and pushing forward. The blade springs upwards and forwards, thereby releasing the material briskly away from the apparatus when the handle is pushed downwards to cause the springs to compress and recoil through the fulcrum member at the axle of the wheel.

[0014] The shovel blade, when configured in a complete arc having tapered walls on the front leading edge of the shovel blade, has been found to provide better handling characteristics due to an even distribution of the load on the

shovel blade when a load, such as snow, is trapped (i.e., loaded) on the blade and the load is dislodged or sprung (i.e., unloaded) from the blade. A rounded back wall allows more even distribution of the load in the shovel blade. For example, when the load enters on one side of the shovel blade, it deflects off the curved back and directs the load to the less full or empty side. More uniform distribution of weight makes throwing easier and requires less user force to prevent tipping of the device to one side. When a flat section is in the back wall of the shovel blade, it has been found to cause the shovel blade to be prone to not distribute the load as uniformly and to cause undesired imbalances due to uneven distribution of a load, such as snow, on the shovel blade.

[0015] In one embodiment, without limitation, the walls of the shovel blade may at its highest point reach about 2 to about 4 inches and taper down to next to nothing near the edge of the shovel blade leading edge and the leading edge of the shovel may have a width of up to about 28 inches, for example between about 20 to about 28 inches, and the shovel blade may have a length from front to back of about 14 to about 22 inches or about 16 to about 20 inches.

[0016] Handling may further be improved when the shovel blade itself is curved as seen from its side perspective. The shovel blade has also been found to work better in retrieving and dispensing material when it is angled with respect to the plane under the shovel blade (from the shovel surface) between any angle of from about 15° to about 35°, or from about 20° to about 30°.

[0017] The shovel blade may comprise one or more projections, e.g., a fork or pitchfork configuration, on the front end of the shovel blade to allow for easier pickup of load material, such as mulch or soil. The shovel blade may also have a changeable front strip portion allowing for easier pick-up of a load by avoiding excessive wear, dents and other imperfections in the front surface formed by prolonged use of the shovel blade which may affect pick-up. When the load is anticipated to be snow, the shovel blade may further comprise an ice chipper attachment that extends in front of the leading edge of the shovel blade. In such case, the chipper edge, not the shovel blade edge, may touch the ground, but still allow loosened iced or packed snow to enter onto the shovel. The shovel blade may also be equipped with a metal wear strip on the leading edge of the shovel blade, which strip may or may not be replaceable.

[0018] The shovel blade may be attached to the yoke by a number of different mechanisms. For example, the shovel blade may be attached by fitting tubes into slots within or on the shovel. It has been found that attachment through an attachment plate on the underside of the shovel blade (non-load carrying side of the shovel blade) adds to the stiffness of the shovel blade while allowing the edges of the shovel blade to flex when hitting hard objects such as packed snow or ice. The plate may have a bend in it to extend further forward (closer to the leading edge) under the shovel blade to support it better. Plates are preferred over extending the main yoke or body when such comprises tubes as there is provided greater clearance (of course, the tube could also be flattened and bent near the ends so that it does not scrape the ground). In an advantageous embodiment, the attachment plate attaches to the underside of the shovel blade at a point from about the middle of the shovel blade closer to the leading edge of the shovel blade. For example, with a plastic blade it has been found that the front end of an attachment plate located from about 2 to about 4 inches from the leading edge of the blade may provide an advantageous lift/stress area without the need for increasing overall blade material thickness and stiffness. The bend in the plate may provide more force in disload by allowing the shovel blade to flex back to the bent portion of the plate and then release its load through a recoil action of both the shovel blade and plate. This enhances performance (without the blade over flexing backward or the bent portion affixing the shovel blade stationarily so as to inhibit bend of the shovel blade). Such attachment plate, and its positioning, may also provide the ability to incorporate more curve in the shovel blade when viewing the blade from the sides, thereby incorporating strength. The edges preferably are more flexible.

[0019] The handle may be configured in a number of ways such as in a closed loop, open bar, dual handles, or straight bar. Hand grips on the handle may be used to improve grip on the device. A particularly useful bar is a curved bar with the curvature away from the machine (i.e., handles expanding out toward user), for example a "Y-shaped" or "U-shaped" bar.

[0020] In one embodiment, the handle is adjustable on the yoke such that the handle can be moved up or down. For example, the handle may be variably attached by use of movable bracket(s) or by sliding the handle portion into a portion of the yoke. In one embodiment, the handle is configured to comprise a moveable tube positioned within a gap of the yoke (e.g., collar) (for example, into a tube

comprising a portion of the yoke) and can be slid in and out of the gap and rotated 360°, preferably affixed in its final position.

[0021] In another embodiment, the handle component is attached to the yoke via attachments through one or more holes in the handle component(s) and one or more holes in the yoke portion interfacing with the handle. Preferably one or both of the handle component or yoke has multiple holes such that the handle can be repositioned up or down along the yoke by matching one of the holes in the handle component to the yoke portion such handle component will interface. The handle assembly may comprise, for example, one piece that is curved or rectangular/square/U-shaped and is open at one end and that fits over a portion of each lateral side of the yoke.

[0022] In one embodiment, the length of the yoke including the handle is about 6 to about 7.5 feet, or about 6.5 to about 7 feet, and the height of the handle from a plane under the wheel is about 40 inches to about 52 inches. The width of the handles in such embodiment are about 21 to about a 26 inches, or about 23 to about 24 inches.

[0023] Another embodiment of the present invention involves a method of method of snow removal using an apparatus comprising a relatively large wheel substantially at the waist level of an operator. A U-shaped yoke has a handle at a closed end, a shovel blade at an open end, and the yoke is mounted onto an axle of the wheel with an axle bracket. The method involves an operator moving the apparatus along a path by pushing the handle and rolling the wheel in a direction commanded by the handle. The operator shoves onto the blade a load of material along the path of the apparatus. After picking up the load of material, the operator presses the handle downwards to lift the shovel blade to a level that clears the path; adjusts further the level of the shovel blade to achieve a balanced load with respect to and over the axle of the wheel; transports the load (which may be balanced) of material to a destination; and at a destination, briskly applies body weight at the handle to propel the load of material to a substantial distance away from the apparatus.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

[0024] *Figure 1* is a three-dimensional embodiment of the apparatus of the present invention showing a relatively large wheel incorporated to a driving member in the shape of a yoke, the yoke having a handle at one end and a shovel blade at the other, for picking up, transporting and disposing materials in general, and snow in particular, according to the present invention.

[0025] *Figure 2* is a top view of the apparatus of *Figure 1*, showing the placement of the shovel and wheel within the yoke, according to the present invention.

[0026] *Figure 3* is a side view of the apparatus of *Figure 2*, showing an aspect of the adjustability of the handle of the apparatus, according to the present invention.

[0027] *Figure 4* is a schematic drawing of the apparatus of *Figure 3* showing the various dimensional relationships of the components of the apparatus of the present invention.

[0028] *Figure 5* is another schematic drawing of the apparatus of *Figure 3* showing the various forces acting at the fulcrum of the apparatus, according to the present invention.

[0029] *Figure 6* is a schematic drawing of an embodiment of the present invention showing the yoke having an "S-shaped" middle portion and a handle which is rotatable and slideably extendable.

[0030] *Figure 7* is a schematic drawing of an aspect of the present invention involving springs as an assist in propelling materials from the shovel blade, according to the present invention.

[0031] *Figure 8* is a schematic drawing of an aspect of an embodiment of the present invention showing blade rollers employed for ease of travel of the blade over rough ground, such as gravel surface, according to the present invention.

[0032] *Figure 9* shows a top view of an adjustable handle assembly.

[0033] *Figure 10* shows a handle assembly including an adjustable handle element capable of 360° fixed rotation.

[0034] **Figure 11** shows a side view of an exemplary yoke having an adjustable notched element in its middle portion.

[0035] **Figure 12** shows a top view of a shovel blade having arced walls.

[0036] **Figure 13** shows the side cut view of an angled shovel blade.

[0037] **Figure 14** shows a top view of a shovel blade – yoke attachment assembly having an attachment plate adjoining two elements of the yoke.

[0038] **Figure 15** shows a top view of a shovel blade – yoke attachment assembly having an angled attachment plate adjoining two elements of the yoke.

[0039] **Figure 16** shows a cut side view of the shovel blade – yoke attachment with angled attachment plate of **Figure 15**.

[0040] **Figure 17** shows a perspective view of an adjustable handle assembly embodiment.

[0041] **Figure 18** shows a perspective view of yet another adjustable handle assembly embodiment.

[0042] **Figure 19** shows an embodiment of a smaller wheeled shovel juxtaposed to compare to the larger wheeled shovel, where both are in the pre-load position.

[0043] **Figure 20** shows an embodiment of a smaller wheeled shovel juxtaposed to compare to the larger wheeled shovel, where both are in the unload position after the handle has been pushed down to propel the shovel and hence to load to an upward trajectory.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0044] Referring now to the drawings, **Figures 1-20**, there are shown embodiments of the present invention involving the pick up, transport and disposal of materials in an efficient and effective manner.

[0045] Reference numeral **10** in **Figure 1** generally refers to an apparatus representing an embodiment of the present invention comprising a wheel assembly **100**, a driving member **110**, resembling substantially a U-shaped yoke having a handle **133** at its closed end and a shovel blade **120** attached to its open end,

wherein the yoke is mounted onto axle **190** of the wheel. The wheel and the blade are incorporated into the driving member in a manner that the blade rests on the ground in its normal position. An operator uses the handle to move the shovel in any direction by rolling the wheel on the ground. The operator also uses the handle to guide the shovel in shoving into the blade material lying along its path. The operator then lifts the shovel blade off the ground to pick up a load of material, followed by further lifting to balance the load at a comfortable walking posture. At destination, the operator presses on the handle with a quick downward body (or arm) motion, to propel the load away from the shovel. The operator can dispose the material either straight ahead by directing the shovel in the direction of the motion of the apparatus, or to the side by flipping the shovel sideways.

[0046] It will be appreciated by those skilled in the art and by ordinary users of snow shovels that the large wheel **100** shown in *Figure 1* (as further defined below and depicted in *Figure 3* relative to human dimensions) enables a user to lift snow and blade above unshoveled snow height and travel over it and rough surface without compressing unshoveled area to be traversed. The relatively high level handle of the shovel enables the user to comfortably accelerate forward the load of snow off the blade while pushing down the handle, which enhances the throw distance of the snow trajectory. The larger wheel and higher axle may provide greater distance over which to accelerate and throw the load.

[0047] The wheel assembly **100**, driving member **110** and shovel **120** are formed ergonomically to assist in picking up and releasing a heap of material **160**, such as sand, gravel or snow, generally aligned in the direction of motion, with least stress to the body of the operator, and especially to prevent back stress or injury. As will be explained more in detail later in an embodiment of the present invention, a recoil assist is provided to the action of the operator of the apparatus from a fulcrum area of the apparatus to release the material in a brisk and efficient manner. The material can also be picked up and released while the wheel is stationary. Furthermore, the material can be throwingly released, or propelled, forward or sideways, as desired, while the wheel is stationary or in motion.

[0048] In an embodiment of the present invention shown in *Figure 1*, driving member **110** is formed preferably of continuous metal tubing that is shaped to have a handle **133** in its upper portion **130**, a fulcrum bearing area **145** in middle

portion **140** and an open frame **155** in the lower portion **150** to accept blade **120**. Handle **133** is extendable at **115** to permit length, height and leverage adjustments, as will be described in more detail later in the various embodiments of the present invention. Fulcrum bearing area **145** shown in the same *Figure 1* comprises an opening in the middle portion **140** of the driving member, preferably capable of receiving a roller bearing (not shown). A portion **195** of axle **190** of the wheel assembly **100** fits inside the fulcrum area **145** of the driving member. The attachment point at **145** is designed to reconfigure the shovel for user height, strength and snow conditions. An attachment that can slide along the middle portion of the driving member can be used to adjust the height of the handle for leverage as well as for ease of operation of the apparatus. Aspects of the function of the fulcrum, and attachments thereto, will be explained in more detail below with respect to the relationship of the fulcrum to the handle and the shovel for disposing of materials from the shovel in a brisk, and yet ergonomically advantageous manner.

[0049] In an aspect of the embodiment shown in *Figure 1*, the driving member **110** is formed in an elongate U-shape, resembling a yoke, with an upper portion providing the handle **133**, and a narrowed middle portion **140** with distal sides to accommodate the axle **125** of the wheel assembly **100**. The distance between the relatively long legs (encompassing generally the middle portion **140**) of the U-shaped driving member **110** is determined by braces **117**, **119** and **157** formed judiciously between the legs so that the axle fits in the fulcrum areas **145**. It will be known to those skilled in the art that any number of different ways can be employed to attach the axle of the wheel in the openings forming the fulcrum areas **145**. For example, the well-known quick release for bicycle wheels can be employed. Or, the axle, in the form of a tube having protrusions **195** with inside shoulders (not shown) can be snapped into openings **145** by gently spreading apart the legs **140** of the U-shaped driving member. These wheel mounting features are well known in the art and as they are not significant to the invention, they are not described in detail here in order not to unnecessarily obscure the present invention. It is preferred that the tubing material for the driving member **110** comprises hollow aluminum, or other metal tubing. Non-metal materials, such as plastics may also be used.

[0050] In another aspect of an embodiment of the present invention, wheel assembly **100** comprises a wheel **170**, a rim **175** and spokes **180** which

connect the axle 190 to rim 175, as shown in *Figure 1* and in top view of *Figure 2*. Different types of wheels, including different treads, widths or a continuous web connecting the axle to the rim can also be used. Relatively narrow wheels, such as shown in *Figure 1*, provide the advantage of not packing down snow, for example, when shoveling snow. The dimensions of wheel 170 and the position of handle 133 relative to axle 190 of the wheel are determined generally with respect to the position of the arms of a human body. A relative position of handle 133 with respect to a general body posture is shown in *Figure 3*.

[0051] In still another aspect of an embodiment of the present invention shown in *Figure 4*, it is preferred that the wheel diameter a is between about 30 to 36 inches, while the height of handle 110 from a datum plane directly under the wheel, that is, from a ground datum x , is between about 48 to 60 inches. The height of handle 133 from the center of axle 195 is preferably between about 26 to 32 inches or from about 22 to about 32 inches. In another aspect of the present invention, further adjustment of the height of the handle is provided by a telescoping means 115, such as a sliding hollow outer tube over an inner tube as shown in *Figure 3*, which ensures better ergonomic comfort. The over-all length d of the wheeled shovel is between from about 72 inches to about 90 inches or from about 78 to 88 inches. Distance e from the tip of the shovel blade 120 to the fulcrum area 145 near the center of the wheel assembly 100 is between about 32 to 42 inches. Distance f from the fulcrum area to the tip of the handle shown in *Figure 4* can be varied depending upon the preferences on the part of the operator. For example, distance f can be adjusted to make it easier to pick up and lift a load, balance the load on the apparatus more evenly for ease of transport to a location, and/or to gain more leverage in shoving the load from the shovel at the location of interest.

[0052] In *Figure 19*, there is shown one embodiment having two straight, or relatively straight, portion(s) 400 (only one portion shown) comprising yoke 110, having a handle end 133 and shovel end 120. Yoke 110 is supported on each side by angled bracket(s) 405 (405 only shows one bracket) having an internal angle Ψ of about 80° to about 100° . Lower portion 410 of angled bracket(s) 405 is positioned to form an angle Ψ'' of about 110° to about 165° or about 120° to about 140° with lower yoke 110 portion 410 in contact with the shovel blade 120. Upper portion 415 of angled bracket(s) 405 is positioned to form an internal angle Ψ' of about 80° to about 140° , or about 90° to about 130° . The size of the wheel and

where the angled bracket(s) **405** attach to the straight yoke may alter these angles. **Figure 19** further comprises a notched element **205** for permitting yoke **110** to be moved horizontally in respect of the axle **420** of the wheel **430**. **Figure 20** demonstrates the upward position of yoke **110** and shovel blade **120** when force is applied to handle **133** in a downward motion. **Figure 19** and **Figure 20** show, in phantom line projection, a comparison between a large wheel **425** embodiment and the smaller wheel embodiment **430**. As can be seen, a much smaller wheel can be employed to effectuate load and unload of the material on shovel blade **120**, allowing for a more compact device and easier storage.

[0053] Furthermore, in an aspect of an embodiment shown in **Figures 19** and **20**, the combined yoke **110**, shovel **120** and bracket **405** sub-assembly can be readily disassembled from wheel **430** and stored separately. Alternatively, only the yoke **110** and shovel **120** sub-assembly may be disassembled from bracket **405** and stored separately from bracket **405** and wheel **430**. Yoke **110** may be attached to bracket **405** in any number of ways, including quick release clamps or wing-nuts, as schematically represented by reference number **425** in **Figure 20**. The attachment of bracket **425** to wheel **430** can also be affected by nuts or bolts, or quick release mechanisms to notched element **205**. Wheel diameter of such smaller wheels may be from about 20 to about 27 inches.

[0054] Thus, it will be apparent to those skilled in the art that the relationship between the diameter of the wheel, over-all length of the shovel and the height of the shovel handle from the ground determine the ease with which snow may be shoveled. The chest-high position of the handle assists in pushing the accumulated snow or other material that is being shoveled. A ratio greater than 1:1 between the length of the yoke and the height of the handle provides the ease with which a blade full of snow can be lifted as the handle is lowered. This leverage ratio can be varied by varying the point at which the yoke connects to the axle. Furthermore, differently shaped yokes, such as shown in **Figures 4 and 5**, may contribute differently to the efficiency of the shovel. A preferred "S-shaped" yoke is shown in **Figure 6**, and will be described in more detail later in the preferred embodiments of the present invention.

[0055] In addition to the ergonomic advantages, the embodiments of the present invention provide enhanced functional performance through a judicious

use of a fulcrum line formed at the central portion of the wheel assembly shown in **Figure 5**. Line x' passing through the center of the fulcrum area **145** parallel to the ground datum line x forms the fulcrum line. A force F applied to the fulcrum through an action at the handle **133** can be resolved into a horizontal component F_h and a downward vertical component F_v , as shown in **Figure 5**. With no substantial resistance to the horizontal component F_h , the wheel rolls to the left, in accordance with the direction of the applied force F shown in **Figure 5**, while the ground under the wheel reacts to the downward component F_v giving rise to an upward recoil reaction $-F_v$ by the wheel. A brisk and mostly downward action on the handle, using arm and/or body weight, for example, produces a recoil assist to the throwing power. The magnitudes of the component vectors are determined by angle β , of the transmittal force F substantially by angle θ . Angle Ω contributes to the throwing power. Furthermore, the shovel blade can be formed in different configurations to assist in efficient release of material **160** from the shovel. For example, the shovel blade can have a bottom portion with a relatively large radius of curvature ρ , resembling a scoop, for easy slide of material from the shovel, as well as for keeping the material from sliding backwards and spilling off the shovel. It will be appreciated by those skilled in the art that that these various parameters can be set to values that are commensurate with the ergonomic and functional requirements of the apparatus of the present invention.

[0056] **Figure 12** shows a shovel blade **245** having a load carrying inner surface **260** having arced walls **250** having the side walls tapering to near nothing near the leading edge **255** of the shovel blade **245** (both side walls are tapered). In a preferred embodiment shown in **Figure 13**, the shovel blade **245** is arced in side view **265** so as to form an angle between its upper and lower portion.

[0057] **Figure 6** illustrates a preferred embodiment of the invention with similar characters and numerals referring to similar parts throughout the several views. The side-view of the yoke shown in **Figure 6** has an upper portion **130**, middle portion **140** and a lower portion **150**. The yoke is attached to wheel **170** (shown in phantom) at its axle **195** (not shown) in a notch **O** of a slideable sleeve **143**. Sleeve **143** can be slid (in the direction of either one of the arrows shown in the same figure) over portion **150** of the yoke to change the position of fulcrum **145**, the effective leverage length f and the "throw arm" e . The throw is accomplished by pushing handle **133** in a downward direction to the phantom

position **133'**. The primed reference numerals, namely, **130'**, **135'**, **140'**, **150'** and **120'**, show other parts of the yoke **110**, including the shovel blade, in a position following the downward motion of the handle of the yoke **110**. It will be understood by those skilled in the art that various different mechanisms can be used to adjust the fulcrum point to achieve the desired leverage for throwing the load off the shovel.

[0058] In *Figure 11*, there is shown a side view of a yoke or driving member **110** having an adjustable length notched element **205**, for example a bar, in the middle portion with one or more notches **210** which allows the fulcrum point to be changed without changing (or reducing the amount of change in the height of the handle above a plane positioned at the bottom of the wheel necessary to effectuate the same applied force:load displaced ratio), the length of the yoke portion above the middle portion and/or changing the length of the yoke portion below the middle portion. The notches may be various shapes such as rectangular, square, circular, or angled. Angled slots may be preferred as they may reduce the inclination of the wheel in respect to the notched element to permit better fixation.

[0059] By changing the notch **210** associated with the axle (e.g., the axle sitting in the notch), the leverage changes even if the structure, height and/or length of the yoke **110** does not change. The notched element **205** may further be configured such that repositioning along the element among the notches can cause a change in the angle of the shovel blade with respect to the ground, such as a change from shape **215** to shape **220**. Reducing the angle of the shovel blade as it strikes the ground reduces friction. In such embodiment, there is shown a yoke **110** having a handle section **133**, an "S-curved" middle section having an upper elbow **225**, a lower elbow **230**, a middle elbow **235**, a linear section **240**, and a shovel blade section of shape **215** and shape **220**. *Figures 11b* and *11c* illustrate other notched element **205** embodiments that may be employed (only a portion of yoke **110** is shown). Notched element **205** of *Figure 11b* illustrates angled notches **210'** which allow for improved holding of the yoke **110** to the axle as the yoke **110** is moved back and forth. Notched element **205** of *Figure 11c* comprises openings **210''** in the form of hole(s). Attachment through holes further enhances the holding of the yoke **110** to the axle as the yoke **110** is moved back and forth.

[0060] An aspect of an embodiment of the present Invention involves an "S-curved" section forming the middle portion **140** of the yoke shown in *Figure 6*. The substantially "S-curve" (including the substantially straight section in the middle portion of the curve) is integral to optimizing "gearing"/leveraging in order to enhance the acceleration of the blade and throwing of the load faster, higher and farther from the shovel. The "S" shape is formed to have the lower curve, subtending angle ϕ . Angle ϕ of the lower portion of the "S-curve" and angle ϕ' of the upper portion, as shown in *Figure 6*, are both preferred to be between about 80° and 90° , though it will be appreciated that other angles may also be used. In one embodiment (not shown), with unanticipated leverage ability, the included angle ϕ' is between about 80° to about 120° , or more advantageously between about 80° to about 100° , and between about 80° to about 90° , and the angle ϕ is between about 110° to about 165° , or about 120° to about 155° . In such cases, the upper angle with the lower angle provide for a top handle section that can be relatively straight and horizontal. This may enhance performance, for example, by allowing a straight section that allows for ease in handle-length extension without necessarily the need to significantly change handle height as compared to other configurations. It may also allow the user to exert greater force without unduly increasing the friction of the shovel with the ground as compared to other configurations. Turning back to *Figure 6*, as handle **133** is lowered, the elbow of the lower portion of the "S-curve" travels a distance **A** through arcs Σ_1 and Σ_2 , as shown in the same *Figure 6*. The straight portion of the S-curve traverses the arcs Δ_1 and Δ_2 . As the handle is lowered, the "S-curve" starts moving downward and the handle thus only needs to be lowered an amount equal to **T** in order to lift blade **120** to height **M** in new position **120'**. It is an aspect of the present invention that, as the middle portion **140** comprising the "S-curve", including the straight section, is positioned closer to the fulcrum area **145**, the magnitude of **A** and leverage ratio **M/T** (the ratio of blade lift to handle movement) are varied accordingly. It is preferred that the length **H** of the straight section of the "S-curve" is greater than **A** so that throughout the entire range of handle motion, the desired leverage (based on axle attachment point) or "gearing", is maintained as the blade is raised and lowered. Thus, for optimal operation (i.e., comfortably, and without bending on the part of the operator of the shovel) it is preferred that the maximum travel **T** of handle **T > H > A**, $\Delta_1 \approx \Delta_2$, and $\Sigma_1 \approx \Sigma_2$.

[0061] In another aspect of the present invention, the handle portion **133** shown in *Figure 6* has a shank **134**, which slideably and rotatably fits inside hollow sleeve section **135**. Handle **133** can be pulled out, pushed in and/or rotated in order to find the most ergonomic position for shoving, picking up and throwing a load from the shovel. Shank **134** can be slid to any one of continuous positions along sleeve **135** by utilizing friction hold against the inside surface of the hollow sleeve **135**. However, pins **137** are preferred which engage holes **139** judiciously placed along the length of section **135**. Length **E** along handle **133** is between about 12 to 18 inches, while length **L** along section **135** is between about 16 to 24 inches, although other lengths can also be used. The over-all length **d** of the shovel apparatus can be increased by Δ_d , preferably between about 6 to 12 inches, while the over-all height **c** can be increased by Δ_c , preferably between about 4 to 8 inches, thus yielding an over-all length **G** between about 84 to about 100 inches, or about 84 to about 96 inches and over-all height **I** between about 40 to 66 inches, or about 42 to about 60 inches. With the preferred dimensions cited here, the shovel blade can be comfortably raised to a height between about 36 to 44 inches, providing a full range of motion and "follow through" to enhance throwing ability.

[0062] *Figure 9* shows a handle assembly **275** wherein a "U-shaped" handle bar **280** is housed in its middle part in cross housing **290** supported by two support bars **300**, **300'**. "U-shaped" handle bar **280** is shown to be moveable within cross housing **290** comprising a tubular housing. Handle bar **280** is also shown to comprise hand grips **305**, **305'**.

[0063] *Figure 10* shows a handle assembly **275'** wherein the assembly includes adjustable handle elements **310**, **310'** inserted into open tubular handles **315**, **315'** (**315**, **315'** each show two configurations of the handle element), such handle elements to provide friction to the inner walls of open tubular handle **315**, **315'** and to permit sliding of the adjustable handle elements within **315**, **315'** to allow for 360° movement. Handle elements **315**, **315'** may be covered with a covering (not shown) for aesthetic reasons and/or for easier gripping.

[0064] *Figure 17(A)* shows a perspective view of a handle assembly embodiment **350**. Such embodiment includes an attachment plate **355** which may be, for example, welded or attached in some other fashion to the yoke **387**. Attachment plate **355** includes a plurality of attachment conduits **360**, shown as

holes in the illustration, positioned for attaching engagement with corresponding attachment conduits **360'**, also shown as holes in the illustration, associated with handle **370**. Handle **370** is shown to comprise a horizontal bar **375**, which may be tubular in configuration, fixed to a bent plate portion **380** having a lower portion comprising attachment conduits **360'**. Conduit(s) **360'** can be attached to corresponding conduit **360** in attachment plate **355** by way of fastener **385**, such as a bolt. The bend in the bent plate portion **380** of handle **370** allows the handle to be flipped over and installed upside down to change handle height, and the different attachment conduits allow the handle height to be set at different heights. **Figure 17(B)** shows another handle assembly embodiment wherein the end of the yoke is adapted to include an expanded open attachment end **387** having a top attachment plate **355'** with attachment conduits **360** (shown as holes), a bottom plate (not shown) opposed to said top attachment plate **355'** (the bottom plate also preferably constituting an attachment plate with attachment conduits), and an open end **386** configured to permit the bent portion of handle **370** to fit between the top attachment plate **355'** and the bottom plate. One or more, preferably all, attachment conduits in top attachment plate **355'**, in the bent portion of handle **370**, and in the bottom attachment plate (not shown) are preferably matched to allow a fastener **385**, for example a bolt, to course through each. Fastener **385** may lock the attachment through other attachments such as a nut **362**.

[0065] **Figure 18** shows a perspective view of yet another adjustable handle assembly embodiment **390**. Such embodiment also comprises a handle **370** comprising a horizontal bar **375** affixed to a bent plate portion **380** having a lower portion comprising attachment conduits **360'**. As opposed to the embodiment in **Figure 17**, rather than attachment plate **355** (of **Figure 17**), corresponding conduits **360** are found in the yoke proper **387**. Conduit(s) **360'** can be attached to corresponding conduit(s) **360** in yoke **387** by way of a fastener **385**, for example a bolt. Alternatively, such attachment of handle **370** to yoke **387** can be done by slotted section such that they attach to one another without a fastener but are still secure (not shown).

[0066] In another aspect of the present invention, a plurality of springs **200** (only one shown in the side view in **Figure 7**) are utilized to provide an enhanced recoil reaction at the fulcrum line when the tire used for the wheel **170** is not as flexible as for example, a bicycle tire with a pneumatic tube. In **Figure 7**,

axle **190** is adapted to receive one spring at each of the two respective ends **195** of the axle which act as a fulcrum and transmit a recoil reaction to shovel blade from an action applied at the axle.

[0067] In still another aspect of the present invention, rollers **210** are attached to the bottom of shovel blade **120** for ease of traversing over rough ground surface **220**, such as gravel, as shown in *Figure 8*. It will be obvious to those skilled in the art that rollers will also reduce friction with the ground, especially as more load accumulates on the shovel while the shovel is being pushed forward to pick up more material, such as snow, from the ground. Similar rollers with similar reference numerals are shown in *Figure 6* where the primed numeral corresponds to the position of the rollers when shovel **120** is elevated. As seen in *Figure 6*, the shovel to which the roller is attached has a lateral dimension **P** between about 15 to 18 inches.

[0068] *Figures 14 – 15* show a shovel blade – yoke attachment assembly **320**. Such assembly includes yoke blade attachment ends **330**, **330'** and attachment plate **325** having a plurality of attachment portions **335**, shown in the figure as a number of holes through which affixing devices, such as bolts, may be placed. The attachment to the shovel blade may or may not entail components or load surface of the shovel blade. In *Figure 15*, a preferred attachment plate **325** having a horizontal plane portion **340** and angled plane portion **345** are shown. An included angle may be about 120° to about 170°, or about 130° to about 150°. The angle gives strength to resist bending of the plate. The angled plane portion **345**, when not affixed to the shovel blade, allows a flexing and recoil of the shovel blade, aiding in loading and unloading of a load. *Figure 16* shows a cross-sectional view of such angled plate.

[0069] The embodiments of the present invention shown in *Figures 1 – 20* are adaptable for various enhancements and improvements in useful ways. For example, a shovel blade may be designed with a more flexible material to enhance the ability to throw the shovel load. The flexibility of the blade would provide a trampoline effect as the blades flexes back to its original shape from a bent shape as it accelerates to unload the load. A comparable effect is obtained by attaching the shovel blade to the shovel yoke with a spring-loaded hinge (not shown) that enhances the throwing capacity of the wheeled shovel. Furthermore, shovel blade

120 is fitted with side walls **125** as shown in *Figure 3* in order to be able to pick up and retain liquid like substances, such as snow slush. In another aspect, the driving member, resembling a yoke, is made to fold at the fulcrum area where a quick release wheel is mounted and removed readily for ease of transporting the apparatus. As an alternative, the driving member comprises two halves (not shown) attached to each other at the fulcrum area **145** of *Figure 1*. It will also be understood that a plurality of wheels of various widths can be used instead of the one wheel shown in *Figures 1-20* of the present invention. Further, the apparatus can be motorized to pick up, transport and propel a load of material from the wheeled shovel of the present invention. Also, motor energy can be utilized to store energy in a spring or in other energy storing device, which in turn can be used on demand to assist in pushing and/or throwing the load on the shovel.

[0070] Though these numerous details of the disclosed apparatus and method are set forth here, such as the various dimensions, to provide an understanding of the present invention, it will be obvious, however, to those skilled in the art that these specific details need not be employed to practice the present invention. That is, while the invention has been particularly shown and described with reference to the embodiments thereof, it will be understood by those skilled in the art that various changes in form and details may be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention.

What is claimed is:

1. An apparatus for removal and disposal of materials comprising:

a wheel assembly having a rim and an axle connected together with spokes radially projecting from the axle, the axle including a fulcrum member capable of transmitting a recoil reaction to an action;

a yoke having an upper portion, a middle portion and a lower portion, wherein the middle portion is attached to the fulcrum member of the axle and has an "S-shape" defined by a lower portion included angle Φ and upper portion included angle Φ' wherein Φ' is between 80° and 90°;

a handle attached to the upper portion of the driving member and capable of moving the wheel assembly, wherein the ratio of the length of the yoke to the height of the handle is greater than 1:1;

a blade attached to the lower portion of the driving member, the blade adapted to pick up a load of material from a surface when the blade is lowered to the surface by raising the handle and pushing forward; and

wherein the blade springs upwards and forwards, thereby releasing the load of material briskly away from the apparatus when the handle is pushed downwards to cause the wheel to compress and recoil through the fulcrum member at the axle of the wheel.

2. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the lower portion included angle Φ is between about 110° to about 165°.

3. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the wheel assembly has a quick release for disconnecting the wheel assembly from the driving member.

4. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the lower portion included angle Φ is between 80° and 90°.

5. The apparatus according to claim 4, wherein the blade comprises a curved surface and having side walls along its periphery tapered from the back of the blade to the leading edge of the blade.

6. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the yoke has a notched element in said middle portion, wherein the notches are configured to allow different positional attachment of the yoke in respect of the axle.

- 7.** The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the blade is attached to the yoke by way of an attachment plate having corresponding holes as found in the blade and a fixation element fixing the corresponding holes to one another.
- 8.** The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the distance between the tip of the blade and the fulcrum area is between about 32 to 42 inches.
- 9.** The apparatus according to claim 8, wherein the height of the handle from a datum place under the wheel is between 48 to 60 inches.
- 10.** The apparatus according to claim 8, wherein the height of the handle from the center of the axle is between 26 to 42 inches.
- 11.** The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the upper portion included angle ϕ' is alternatively between about 80° to about 110° .
- 12.** The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the overall length of the apparatus is between about 78 to 88 inches, and can be increased to between about 89 to 100 inches.
- 13.** The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the lower portion included angle ϕ is between about 140° to about 160° .
- 14.** The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the height of the handle from a datum plane directly under the wheel is between about 48 to 60 inches, and can be increased to between about 42 to 66 inches.
- 15.** The apparatus according to claim 7, wherein the attachment plate is angled.
- 16.** The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the handle is configured to be adjustable in position in respect of the yoke.
- 17.** An apparatus for removal and disposal of materials comprising:
 - a wheel assembly having a rim and a axle, the axle further comprising a tubular body having two ends adapted to receive spokes which connect the axle to the rim;
 - the axle further adapted to receive a plurality of springs at the two respective ends of the axle to act as a fulcrum and transmit a recoil reaction to an action applied at the axle;
 - an elongate U-shaped driving member having a curved upper portion, a generally straight middle portion and an open lower portion, wherein the middle portion is attached to the springs at each end of the axle;

a handle formed from the upper portion of the driving member, the handle capable of moving the wheel assembly; and

a shovel blade attached to the lower portion of the driving member, the shovel blade adapted to pick up material from a surface when the blade is lowered to the surface by raising the handle and pushing forward;

wherein the blade springs upwards and forwards, thereby releasing the material briskly away from the apparatus when the handle is pushed downwards to cause the springs to compress and recoil through the fulcrum member at the axle of the wheel.

18. The apparatus according to claim 17, wherein the axle comprises a tubular body having first and second ends which support spokes connecting the axle to the rim, the tubular body forming the fulcrum member.

19. The apparatus according to claim 17, wherein the plurality of springs comprise a pair of springs, one spring at each end of the two ends of the axle.

20. The apparatus according to claim 17, wherein the pair of springs is compressed when the handle is pushed downwards, the compression providing the recoil action.

21. The apparatus according to claim 17, wherein the blade has two sidewalls and a back wall to keep the load of material from spilling out from the blade.

22. The apparatus according to claim 17, wherein the blade is shaped in the form of a scoop having a radius at the bottom.

23. The apparatus according to claim 17, wherein the driving member comprises a tubular material.

24. The apparatus according to claim 23, wherein the tubular material comprises metal.

25. The apparatus according to claim 17, wherein the handle is slidably adjustable through a telescoping tubular material inside a hollow tubular driving member.

26. The apparatus according to claim 17, wherein the overall length of the apparatus is between about 78 to 88 inches, and can be increased to between about 89 to 100 inches..

27. The apparatus according to claim 17, wherein the diameter of the wheel is between about 30 to 36 inches.

28. The apparatus according to claim 17, wherein the height of the handle from a datum plane directly under the wheel is between about 48 to 60 inches, and can be increased to between about 42 to 66 inches..

29. The apparatus according to claim 17, wherein the load of material comprises sand and gravel.

30. The apparatus according to claim 17, wherein the load of material comprises snow and slush.

31. A method of snow removal, comprising the steps of:

providing an apparatus comprising a relatively large wheel substantially at the waist level of an operator, a yoke having a closed handle end and an open end, a shovel blade at the open end of the yoke, wherein the yoke is mounted onto an axle of the wheel at a middle portion generally "S-shaped" having an upper portion comprising an upper elbow and a lower portion comprising a lower elbow wherein the yoke is mounted onto the axle and configured in a manner such that upon movement of the yoke about the axle, the upper elbow moves a distance **H** that is greater than the distance **A** moved by the lower elbow;

moving the apparatus along a path by pushing the handle and rolling the wheel in a direction commanded by the handle;

shoving onto the blade a load of material lying along the path of the apparatus;

pressing the handle downwards, after picking up the load of material, to lift the shovel blade to a level that clears the path;

adjusting further the level of the shovel blade to achieve a balanced load with respect to and over the axle of the wheel;

transporting the balanced load of material to a destination; and at destination

briskly applying body weight at the handle to propel the load of material to a substantial distance away from the apparatus.

32. A method according to claim 31, wherein the yoke of the apparatus provided has a middle portion between the upper and lower elbow having a notched element configured to allow different positional attachment of the yoke in respect of the axle.

33. A method according to claim 31 wherein the apparatus provided has an overall length of between about 78 to 88 inches which can be increased to between about 89 to 100 inches.

34. A method according to claim 31, wherein the apparatus provided has a "T-shaped" handle attached to a bent yoke attachment plate.

35. A method according to claim 31, wherein the apparatus provided has a handle portion adjustable in position in respect of the yoke.

36. A method according to claim 31, wherein the apparatus provided has a handle portion that can rotate 360°.

37. A method according to claim 31, wherein the apparatus provided has an axle that is adapted to receive a plurality of springs at the two respective ends of the axle to act as a fulcrum and transmit a recoil reaction to an action applied at the axle.

38. A method according to claim 31, wherein the apparatus provided has a wheel adapted to receive an elastic material capable of producing a recoil action to an action applied at the axle.

39. A method according to claim 31, wherein the apparatus provided has a shovel blade with arced side walls tapering toward the leading edge of the shovel blade.

40. A method according to claim 31, wherein the apparatus has a curved shovel blade.

41. A method according to claim 31, wherein the apparatus provided has a shovel blade attached to the yoke through an angled attachment plate.

42. An apparatus for removal and disposal of materials comprising:

- a shovel blade;

- a wheel connected to an axle;

- angled bracket(s) operatively connected to said axle, said angled bracket(s) having a first side and a second side coming together at an apex;

- a driving member having an upper portion, middle portion and an end portion, said end portion connected to said shovel blade, and said upper portion of said driving member being connected to said first side of said angled bracket(s) and said second side of said angled bracket(s) being connected to said end portion of said driving member;

wherein the angled bracket(s) connect to said axle at said apex of said angled bracket(s).

43. An apparatus in accordance with claim 42, wherein the driving member comprises a yoke straddling said wheel.

44. An apparatus in accordance with claim 42, wherein the wheel diameter is from about 20 to about 27 inches.

45. An apparatus in accordance with claim 42, further comprising notched element(s) on said second side of said angled bracket(s), said notched element(s) configured to interact with said axle to affix said angled bracket(s) to said wheel.

46. An apparatus in accordance with claim 42, wherein the angle between the first and second side of the angled bracket(s) is about 80° to about 100°.

47. An apparatus in accordance with claim 42, wherein said first side of said angled bracket(s) connects to said upper portion of said driving member to form an included angle of about 80° to about 140° between said first side of said angled bracket(s) and said upper portion of said driving member.

48. An apparatus in accordance with claim 42, wherein said first side of said angled bracket(s) connects to said upper portion of said driving member to form an included angle of about 90° to about 130° between said first side of said angled bracket(s) and said upper portion of said driving member.

49. An apparatus in accordance with claim 48, wherein the angle is about 90° to about 130°.

50. An apparatus in accordance with claim 42, wherein the said second side of said angled bracket(s) connects to said lower portion of said driving member to form an included angle of about 110° to about 165° or from about 120° to about 140°.

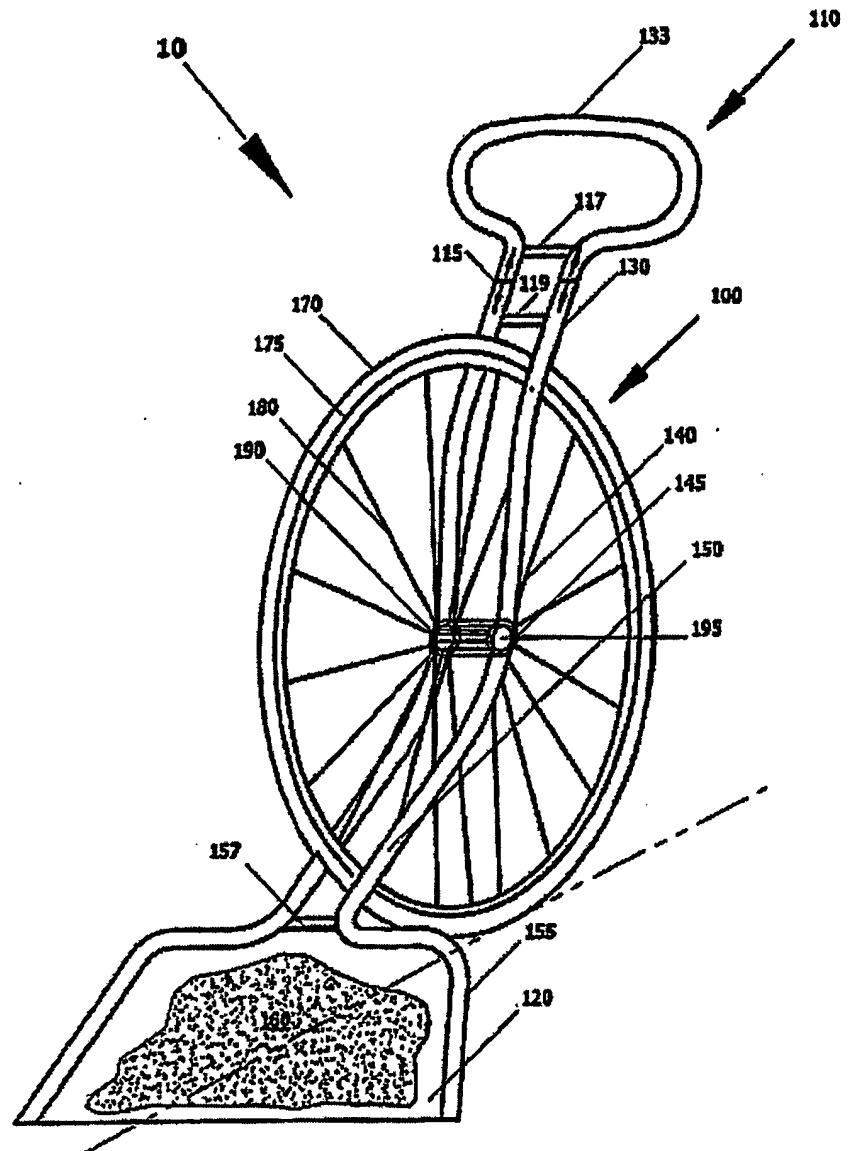
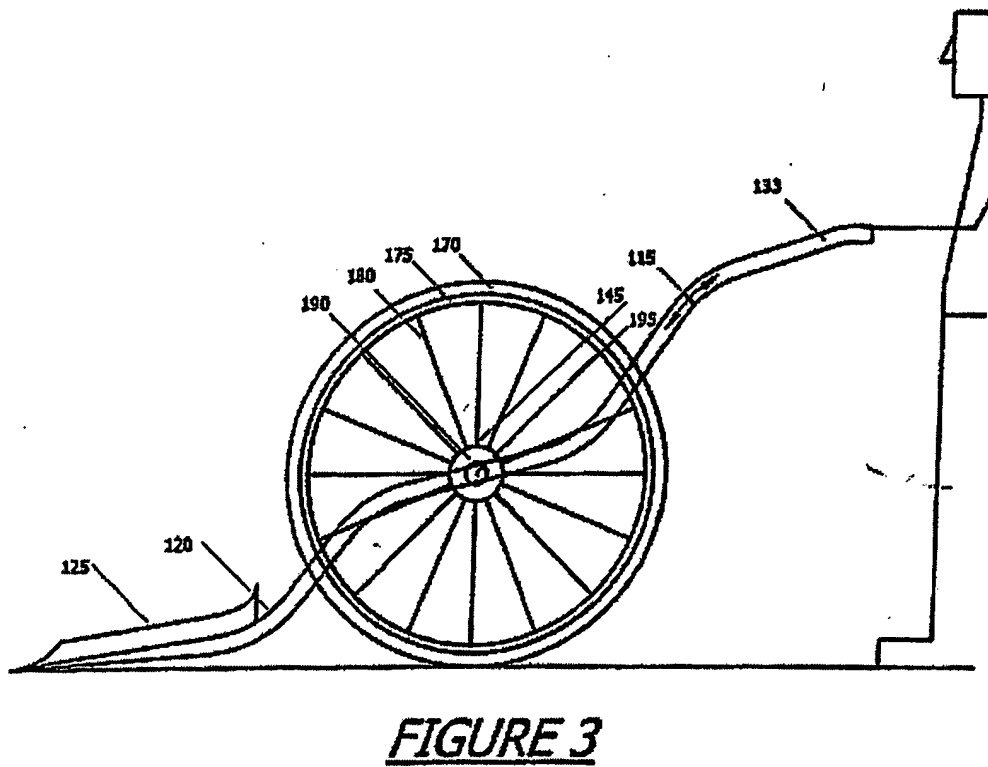
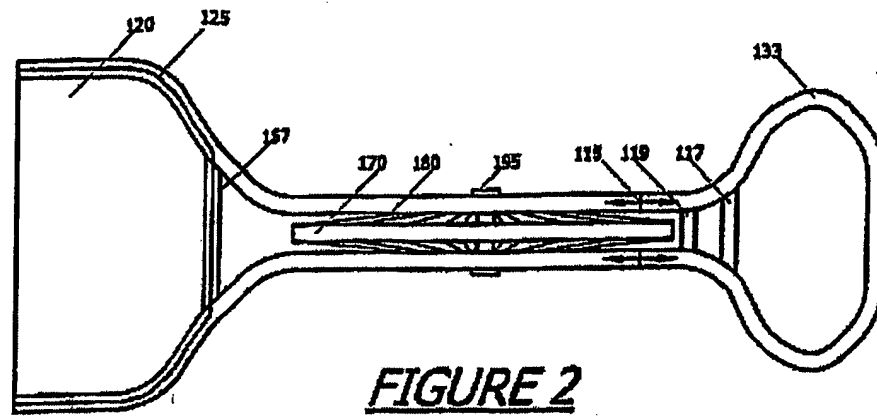
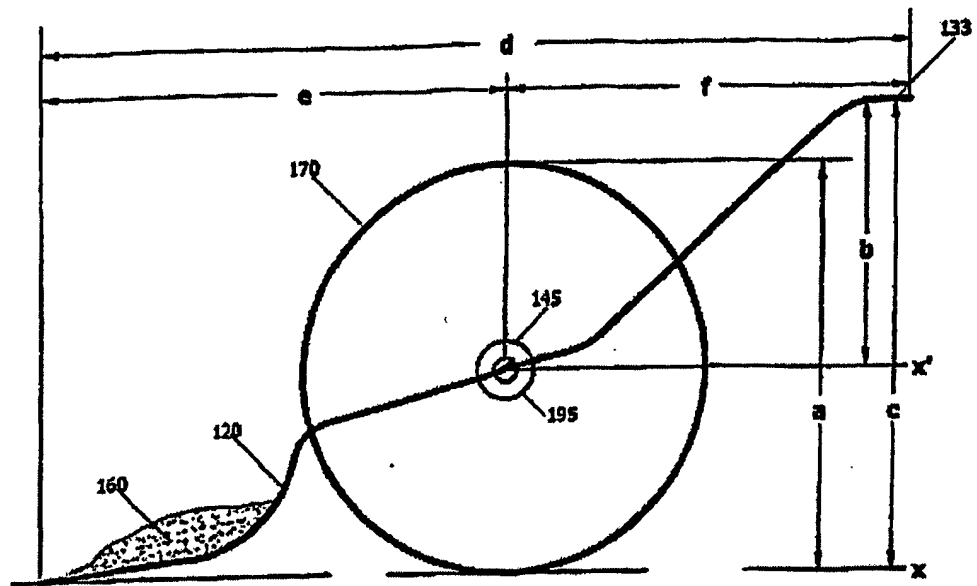
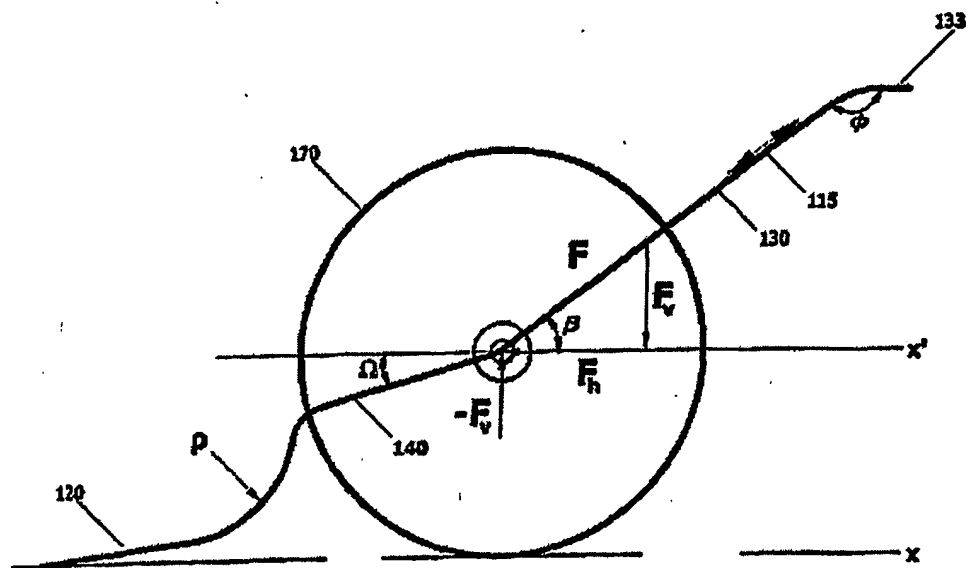


FIGURE 1



**FIGURE 4****FIGURE 5**

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FIG. 1 of 2

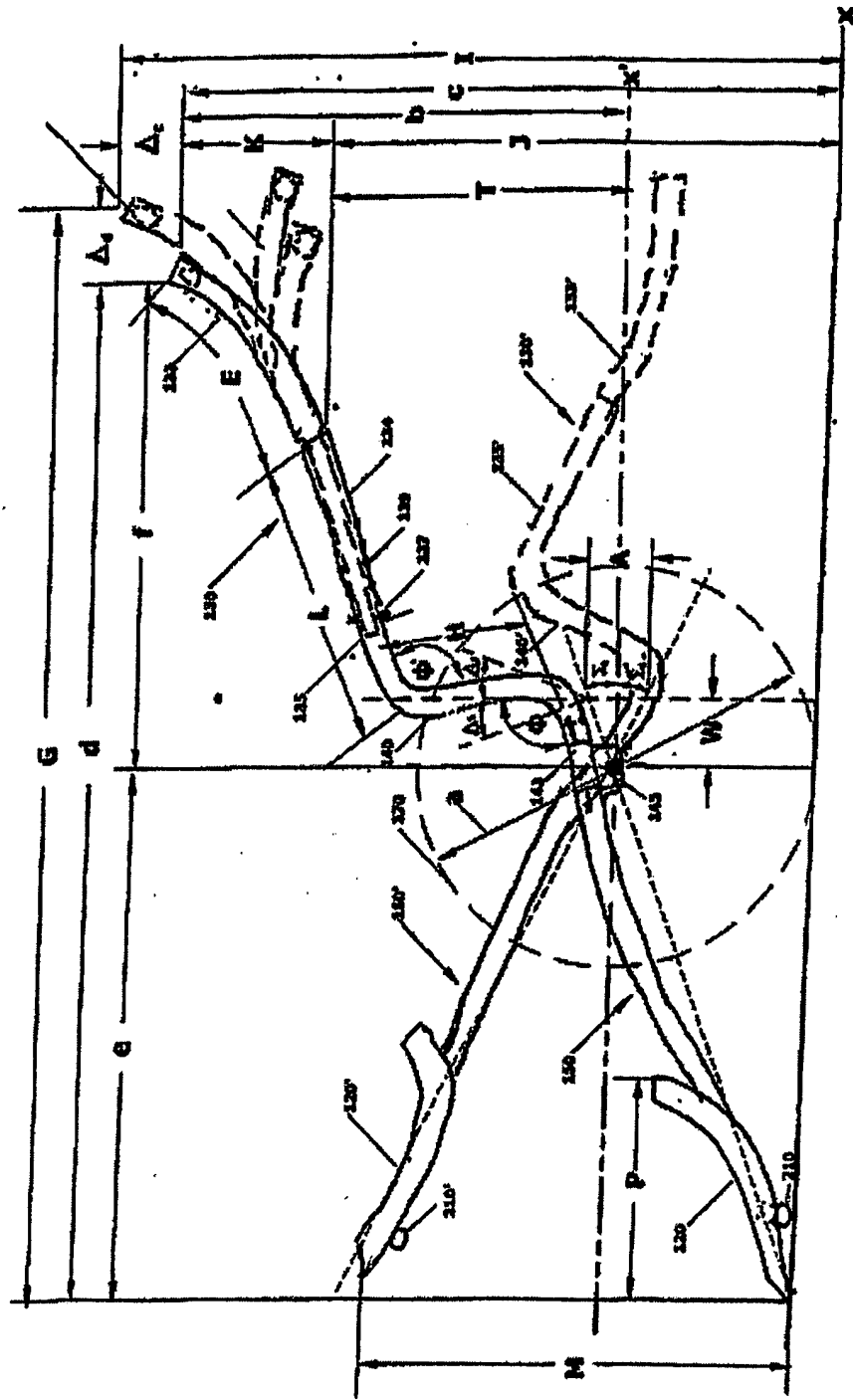


FIGURE 6

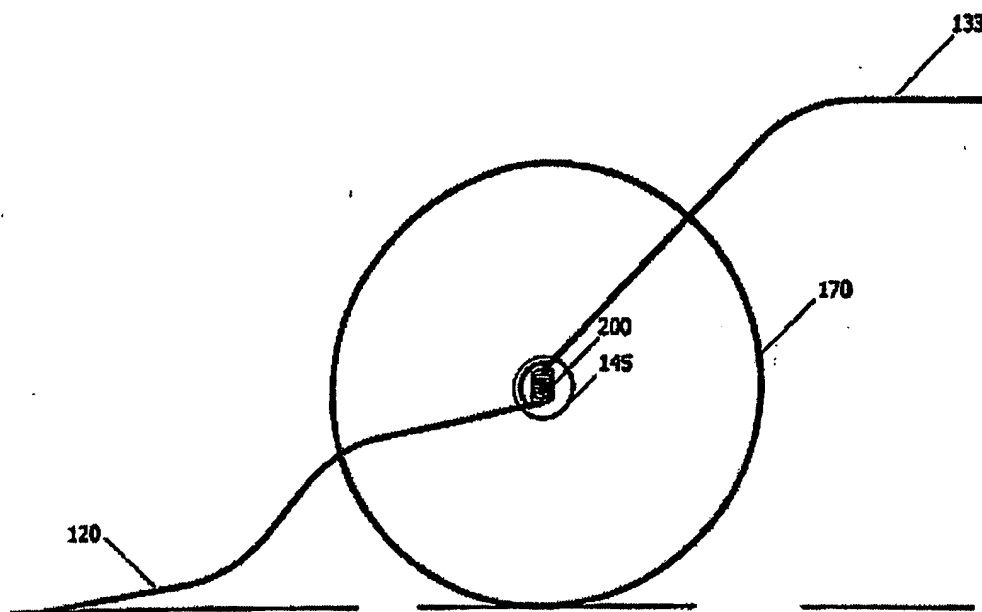


FIGURE 7

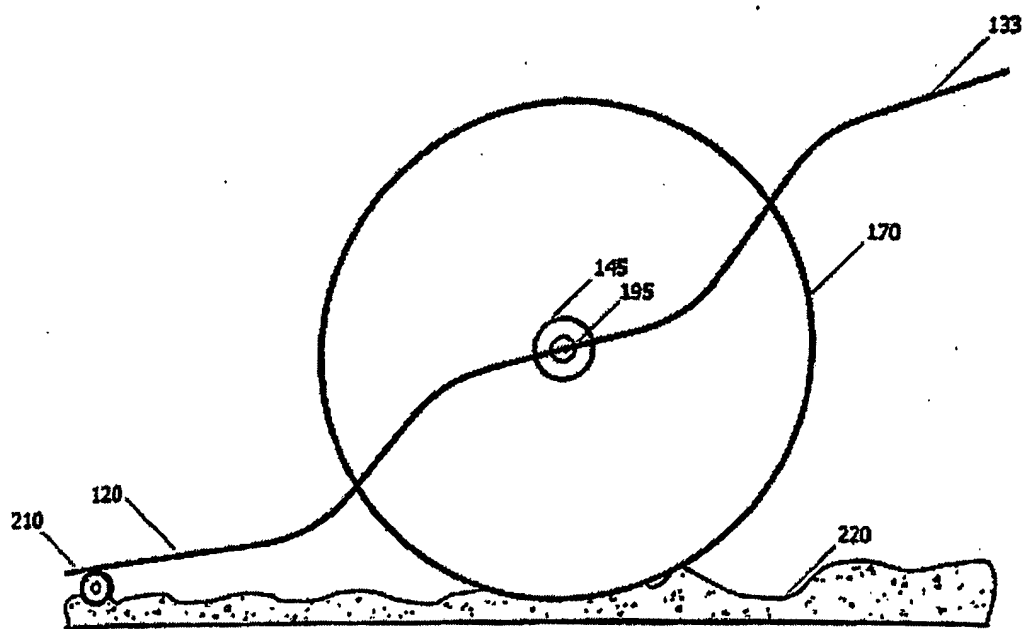


FIGURE 8

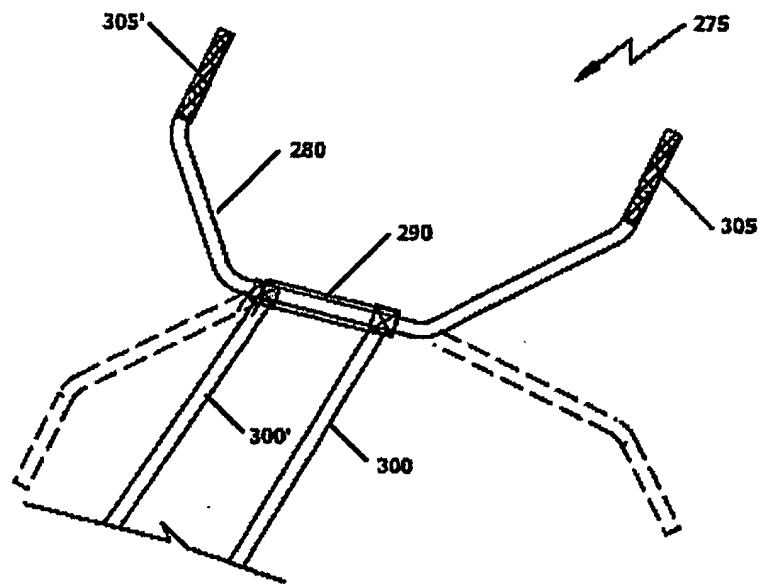


FIGURE 9

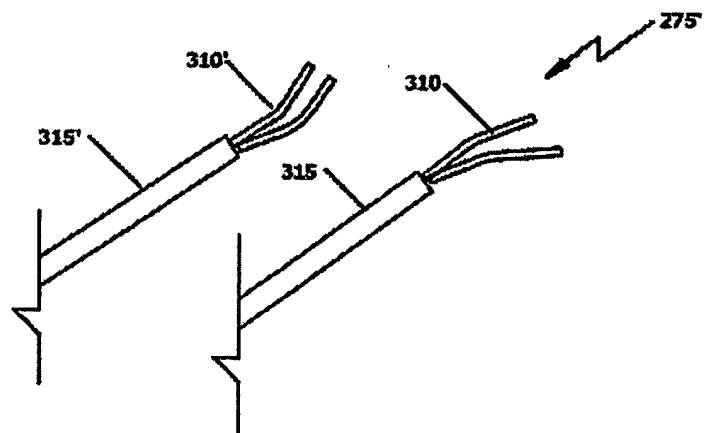
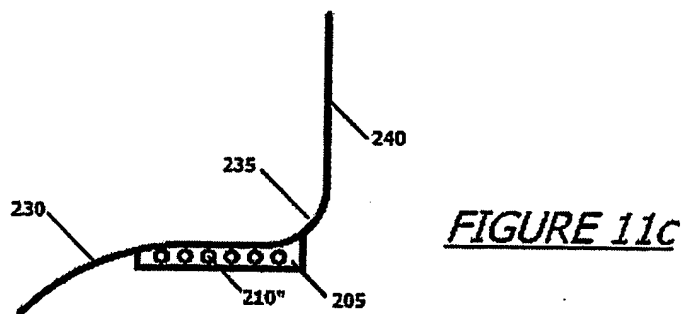
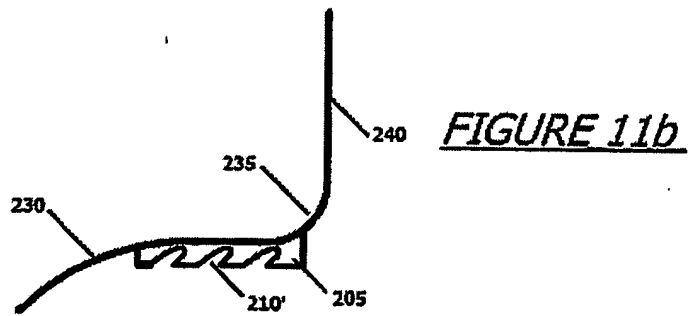
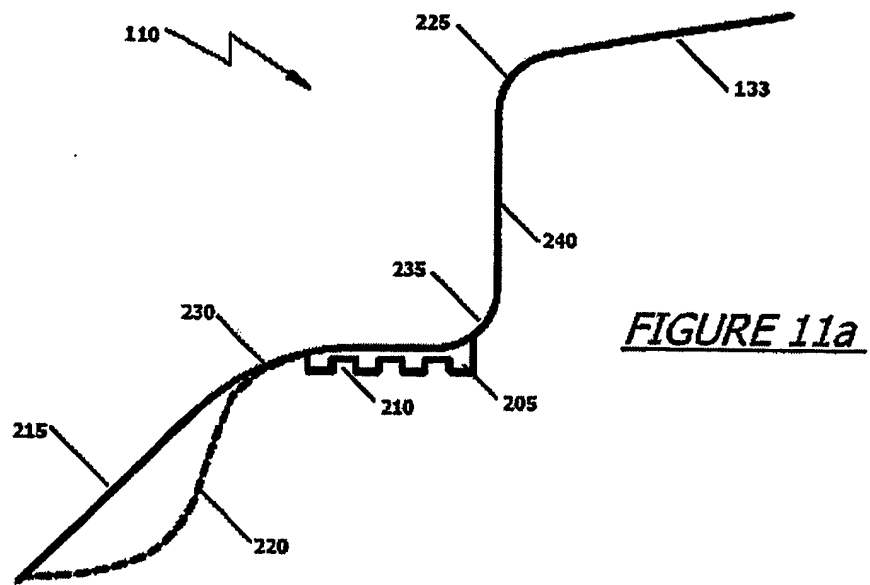


FIGURE 10



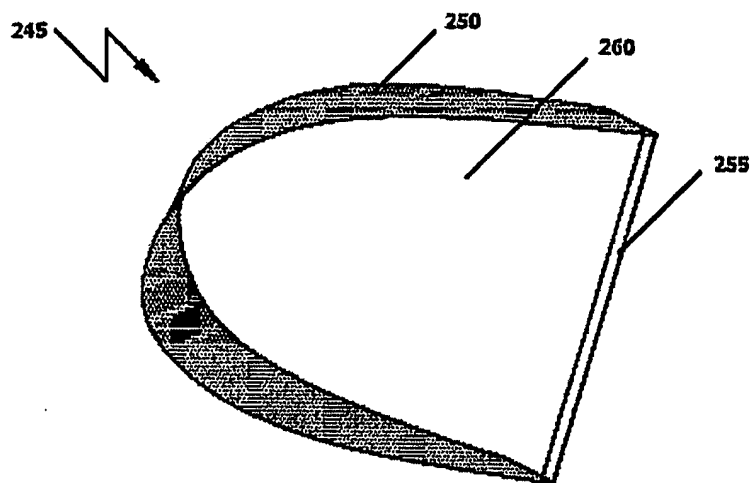


FIGURE 12

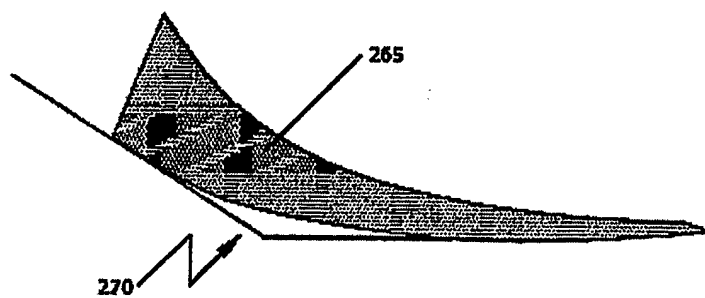


FIGURE 13

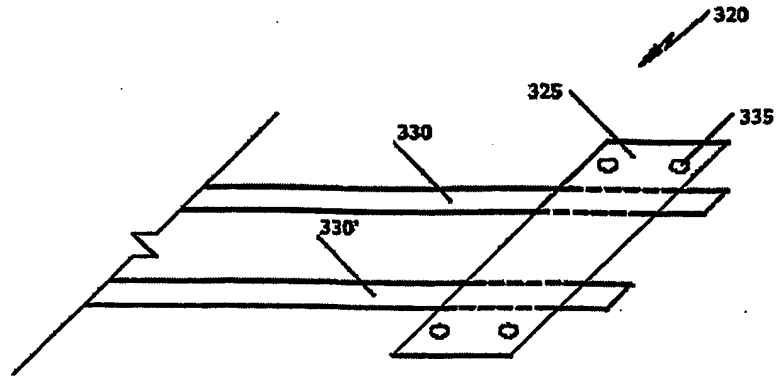


FIGURE 14

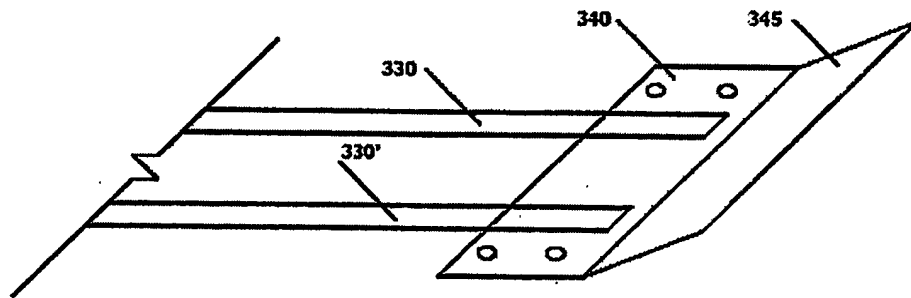


FIGURE 15

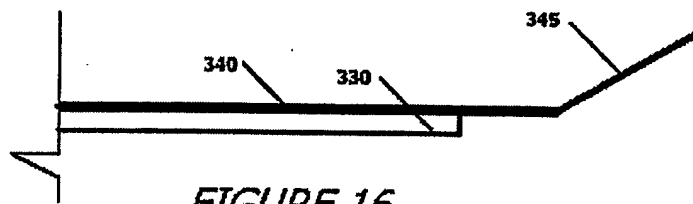


FIGURE 16

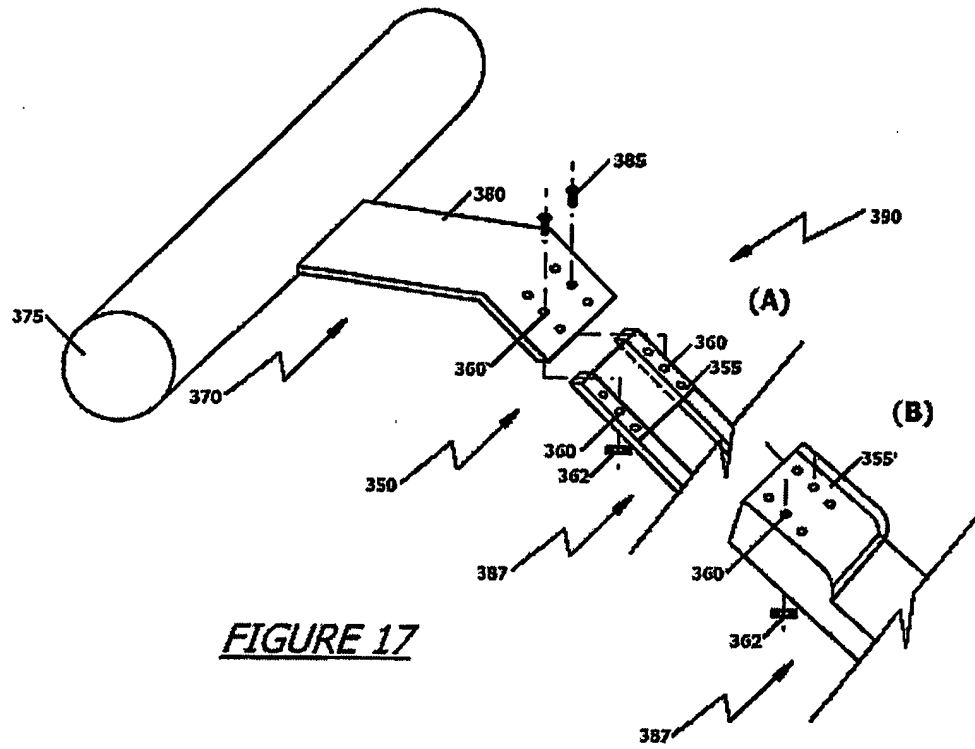


FIGURE 17

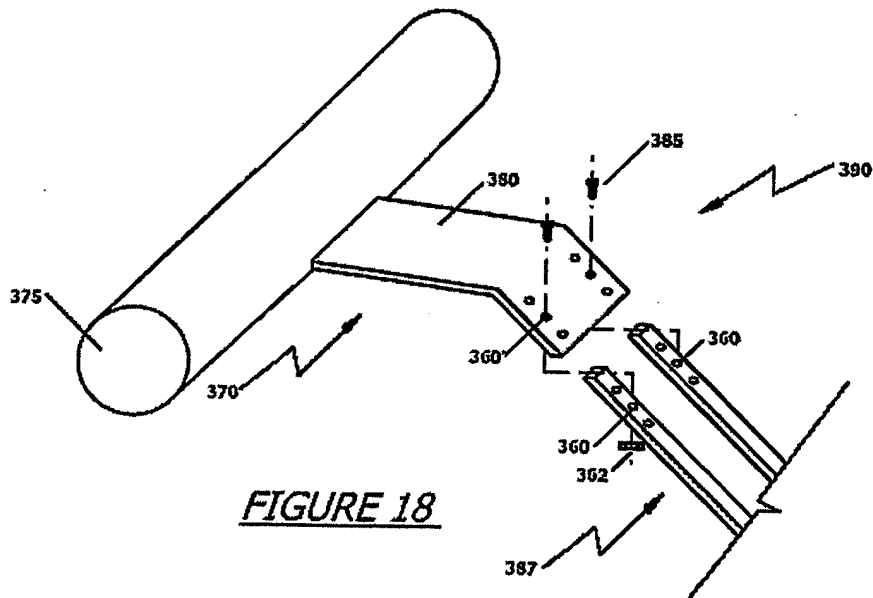


FIGURE 18



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